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ABSTRACT

Images of aging that appear in popular child/teen curricular materials used in church-related contexts were examined to determine how older adults are portrayed in words and pictures in these materials and what images of aging emerge. Materials from the following sources, randomly selected from those that had been checked out of the Ecumenical Resource Center of Richmond, Virginia, during August-September 1989 were examined: Scripture Press, Accent, Bible Discovery (Presbyterian and Reformed Educational Ministry), and the God with Us program. Most of the images of older persons in the materials associated aging with sickness, physical disability, uselessness, wrinkled skin, ugliness, loneliness, poverty, need, lack of knowledge, and grouchiness. In only a few cases were older adults portrayed as strong, wise, and useful. In at least one example, aging was related to sinfulness. The study concluded that the prejudices found in these instructional materials contribute to limiting the view of children/teens toward aged people and perpetuate stereotypes that are not socially adequate. (KC)

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IMAGES OF AGING IN SELECTED RELIGIOUS EDUCATION CURRICULUM MATERIALS

Some twelve percent of the population of the United States is aged sixty-five or older. In the literature available for public use in school libraries, universities, colleges, and bookstores, consistent study on the ways in which older adults are portrayed has been carried out for at least the last ten years.[1] Curricular materials used in church-related contexts, however, received little sustained research. This is curious since churches in the United States are aging at twice the rate of the population. The Southern Baptists, for example, estimate that by the year 2000 (ten years hence), some fifty percent of its membership will be aged sixty and above.

It is the purpose of this informal paper to examine those implicit and explicit images of aging that appear in randomly selected popular pre-adult curricular materials used in church-related contexts during the months August-September, 1989. How

[1]For a characteristic example in this regard, see Fran Pratz, "Problems of Ageism in Literature," in Education for Aging: A Teacher's Sourcebook (Acton, Massachusetts: McCarthy-Towne School, 1981), pp. 1-1 to 2-3.

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are older adults portrayed in words and pictures in these materials, and what images of aging emerge? What are the implications for religious educators?

Selection of Materials

The Ecumenical Resource Center of Richmond, Virginia, is located on the campus of Presbyterian School of Christian Education. Its curriculum holdings, primarily Catholic and Protestant, are made available for review and use by a wide range of Richmond area churches, and may be checked out by local congregational members. I randomly selected those curriculum materials that had been checked out at least twice during the months of August and September of 1989. The "curriculums-in-use" selected were: Scripture Press, Accent, Bible Discovery (Presbyterian and Reformed Educational Ministry), and the God With Us program.

Analysis of Materials

SCRIPTURE PRESS is an independent, evangelical publisher. Its "Bible for Today" curriculum has immediate appeal in color and layout appeal. The materials are easy to use, normally filled with an abundance of supplementary materials, and Bible-based. The dated materials examined in this article were intended for use from December to February, 1990.

In curriculum materials intended for "2s-3s," the December 31 lesson is about Simeon and Anna (see figure A below). The curriculum story reads, "God had told an old, old man, Simeon, a happy secret." The story continues by including a section about

Anna. "It was Anna, an old, old lady." Both Simeon and Anna are portrayed graphically as admiring the baby Jesus, who is held by Simeon.

Figure A

The teaching guide includes a flannelboard story format. The flannelboard figures are extremely colorful, and stand approximately eight inches (see figure B below). As the teacher tells the story with the figures, the teacher is to say,

> Someone else wanted to see Jesus too. It was Anna, an old, old lady. [Place her beside Simeon.] Anna loved God and prayed to Him every day in God's House. When the dear old, old lady Anna saw Jesus, she said, "Thank You, dear God" (p. 31).

In the analysis of general literature, it has been found

that

> Older characters are rarely given fully developed physical descriptions. Instead, they are described by three adjectives--"old," "little," and "ancient." "Old" is used approximately seventy-five percent of the time. No other generation is completely described by the use of one word.[2]
>
> Like their physical traits, personality descriptions are limited to four adjectives--"poor," "sad," "wise," and "dear." These terms suggest an ambivalence to growing older. However, this juxtaposition does not give older persons a full range of emotions with the opportunity for continued growth.[3]

Figure B

The gender related wording is noteworthy. Simeon is an old,old man; however, Anna is an old, old lady. The correspondence between man and woman takes on different shape

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[2]Ibid., p. 1-3.

[3]Ibid.

when man and lady are related. A social role (unclear in text) is intended, however unconsciously, by the term "lady" that is not reciprocated in Simeon the "man."[4] Moreover, Anna is a dear old, old lady; Simeon is described only as an old, old man.

Visually, both Simeon and Anna have wrinkled facial skin, and may be described as deformed and having puffy hands. Simeon has a full beard (extremely light), sunken eyes, and furrowed brows. Both Anna and Simeon adore the baby, it is clear.

This little story for younger children presents a complex, mixed bag of images! On the one hand, Simeon and Anna appear to play a major role in the story. On the other hand, visual and wording aspects of the curriculum tend to reinforce stereotypical images of aging, including gender-related distinctions between men and women.[5] On balance, physical traits and personality traits tend to be negatively portrayed in both instances. This is quite unlike the original biblical text itself (Luke 2), which places Simeon and Anna in centrally important roles in the story. As presented in this brief story, Simeon and Anna are useful only because of their relation to another important person--Jesus. In

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[4]See Francine Wattman Frank and Paula A. Treichler, Language, Gender, and Professional Writing: Theoretical Approaches and Guidelines for Nonsexist Usage (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1989), esp. pp. 5ff.

[5]The masculine God language is noteworthy as well. The "lady" is referred to as a "dear." In the concluding prayer of the lesson, the prayer begins by saying, "Dear God...." If there is a connection between the dear lady and dear God (and I perceive that there is), the attributes of aging as portrayed in this curriculum may assign a gender related role to God that includes not only the negative and stereotypical aspects of old age, but also of uselessness and subordination.

and of themselves there is no indication of integrity, worth, or usefulness.[6]

In the Teaching Guide for "4s and 5s," the teacher training section is entitled, "What Can We Expect from the Children?"[7] Among other things, the article attempts to help teachers understand the various stages of cognitive development of children. In the article, the following story is related:

> "Mmm," said five-year-old Cindy, "this is a good apple. Look, Grandpa. I'm eating it all up!" And she nibbled down to the core.
> Grandpa looked at her and laughed. Then he became serious. "Be careful not to eat the seeds, Cindy. If you do, a tree might grow up inside you."
> Later Cindy was worried since she had already eaten a seed before Grandpa said anything.[8]

Above this paragraph, there is a drawing of the grandfather and child in question. The grandfather is portrayed as a balding, glass wearing, reader of newspapers (see figure C below).

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[6]Similar findings have surfaced in the analysis of literature. See David A. Peterson and Elizabeth L Karnes, "Older People in Adolescent Literature," The Gerontologist, vol. 16, no. 3, 1976.

[7]Vol. 52, no. 2, pp. 38-9.

[8]Ibid., p. 38.

Mmm," said five-year-old Cindy, "this is a good apple. Look, Grandpa, I'm eating it all up!" And she nibbled down to the core.

Grandpa looked at her and laughed. Then he became serious. "Be careful not to eat the seeds, Cindy. If you do, a tree might grow up inside you."

Figure C

The picture of the grandfather/child is juxtaposed across the page with a drawing of a competent teacher and children (see figure D below).

carries over into life situations.

Simply stated, we can summarize by saying that 4s and 5s make judgments based on how things appear to them. If we as teachers keep that fact in mind, and look at our visuals and listen to our own words, we will teach in ways that will communicate clearly to our boys and girls.

not because they understand what they are saying or because they really want to do it.

In dealing with preschoolers, remember this riddle: Why does a teacher of preschoolers need to have "well-oiled knees"? Because in order to communicate with young children on their level, teachers usually kneel. This act of bending down is one important way of acknowledging a child as a human being who deserves a teacher's full attention. (If you answered, "Because you spend a lot of time praying for them," you were right too.)

Figure D

This stereotypical portrayal of an aging adult is more blatant than most, and is focused on the teacher (age unknown) of

children aged four or five. It is clear the writer is attempting to relate to the taken-for-granted world of the teacher (or generic teacher, as the case may be), and this may include notions of "grandfather." The grandfather in this case could be understood as an insensitive trickster who is obviously ignorant of proper developmental theory, or as a sinister prankster who actually enjoys frightening small children. This reader was not sure of the intended interpretation; however, neither alternative places the grandfather in a particularly good light. This situation is exacerbated by the visual juxtaposition of the young, relevant, caring female teacher. The grandfather's eyes are on the newspaper, while the female teacher's eyes are on the students. The female teacher is at eye level with the students, and is embracing them; the grandfather is pictured above the child, with no physical warmth implied. In brief, the grandfather's image is one of ignorant insensitivity and detachment.

Moreover, the book states:

> Researchers who have spent many years studying children have explained and labeled many facts about young children's thinking. Preschool Sunday School teachers have also observed these facts. These definitions and observations can help us understand how to communicate God's Word clearly to 4s and 5s.[9]

In his current state, then, the grandfather is not willing nor capable of communicating "God's Word clearly."

Primary Days is a take-home leaflet produced by Scripture

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[9]Ibid.

Press for its six through eight-year-olds. The December 3, 1989 leaflet includes a story about Mary and Elizabeth entitled, "Mary Shares Her News with Elizabeth," based on passages from Luke 1 and 2. The story is accurately told, and Elizabeth is portrayed in a role of importance, mutuality, and respect. The accompanying painting shows Elizabeth with gray hair and colorful costume. She shows love and warmth for Mary (see figure E below). Mary, in return, clearly needs and respects Elizabeth.

Mary Shares Her News with Elizabeth

Figure E

ACCENT BIBLE CURRICULUM is an attractively produced fundamentalist curriculum independently produced in Denver, Colorado. The popular curriculum materials that are used as samples in the Ecumenical Resource Center date from the summer of 1986, although most of the materials may be used in non-dated ways. The curriculum materials often begin with a statement of belief (see figure F below).

In general, this reader was struck by the relative absence of aging persons in the pre-adult materials. Three fascinating perspectives on aging, however, were unique in this informal curriculum review. In God Helps Me Learn, a child-parent Bible learning book for four and five-year-olds, Bible lesson number three, "Moses Tells the Children to Learn,"[10] Moses tells a group of children and adults about the Exile, and other related issues from the book of Deuteronomy. Moses is visually portrayed as a stern, white-haired (flowing), white-eyebrowed, white-bearded man of great age (see figure G below). The conclusion of the story ends with these words:

> Then Moses said, "Someday your little boys will grow old enough to ask questions and they will ask, 'Why does God tell us these things?'..."[11]

The notion of "old enough" implies a social distancing of the young from an aged bearer of the tradition; namely, Moses. "Old," in this sense is seen in positive terms by the curriculum producers since "enough" presumes the connotation of social

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[10] p. 6.

[11] Ibid.

usefulness and responsibility. By diminishing the importance of young persons in this way, however, the fours and fives for whom this curriculum is intended are presumed to be unimportant by a person who is presented not only as "old enough," but as "old" in negatively stereotypical ways.

The summer 1986 #2 edition of Teen Talk, a leaflet intended for take-home purposes, is entitled, "An Opened Door." A teenage Christian woman (not named, although the story is told from her perspective) goes to care for an aging man with Parkinson's disease. The drawing of the man is visually shocking. Pot-bellied, wrinkled, cane-in-hand, negative, and unfriendly, the

What We Believe
Accent Bible Curriculum adheres to the following statement of faith, assuring you of materials you can use with confidence.
• The Trinity of God
• Verbal, Plenary Inspiration of Scripture
• Total Depravity of Natural Man
• The Virgin Birth of Jesus Christ
• His Blood Atonement
• His Bodily Resurrection
• Personal and Imminent Return of Christ
• Person and Work of the Holy Spirit
• Eternal Security of the Believer
• The Separation of Church and State
• The Autonomy of the Local Church
• Worldwide Missions—the Obligation of Every Church
• A Regenerated Church Membership
• Personality of Satan
• Justification by Faith
• The Reality of Heaven and Hell
• The Priesthood of the Believer
• Two Ordinances Only: Baptism by Immersion and the Lord's Supper

Figure F

Figure G

man meets the young woman at the door of his home (see figure H below). The woman's evaluation of the man upon initial meeting is stark:

> I sat back, thinking, I really wanted to work with young kids, not babysit an old codger!

It is interesting to note that the term "old codger" may be found

Figure H

under the term "old fart" in the Thesaurus of American Slang.[12] Old fart is a slang term referring to an old man. Synonyms include alter kocker, crock, dodo, duffer, fogy, fossil, futz, gaffer, geezer, gramps, old bird, old boy, old buzzard, old duffer, old poop, oldster, old-timer, pappy, and pappy guy.[13] In brief, the statement about the man is recognized to be socially derogatory. The man is portrayed as an obnoxious, physically degenerated "person."

By the end of the story, the man has a change of heart. His self-esteem grows when he finally goes out to his yard and pulls weeds--something he has not done for years. In the story, the man became acceptable only after he became physically useful to the young woman. In this brief paper intended for teens, several areas of stereotypical thinking are manifest. It is, in fact, a tour de force of unreflective prejudice in church-related curriculum. Aging was associated with disease, negative physical and mental conditions, obnoxious behavior, uselessness, and insignficance in ways that simply reinforce misunderstanding of the aging population of the church as a whole.[14]

Genesis in the Science Lab is a "Trek" student book intended for high school use. In chapter seven, a fascinating

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[12]Edited by Robert L. Chapman (New York: Harper and Row, 1989).

[13]Ibid., p. 177.

[14]For similar concerns from an informal linguistic point of view, see Frank H. Nuessel, Jr., "The Language of Ageism," The Gerontologist, vol. 22, no. 3, 1982.

section begins with the heading, "Those antediluvians."[15] According to the curriculum, before the flood, a canopy of water vapor covered the globe. "A canopy of vapor would produce a greenhouse effect over the entire earth!"[16] The greenhouse effect resulted in an Hawaiian-like "perfect climate" all over the world; no, "Hawaii was nothing compared to that early earth!"[17] The conclusion of this description of an ecological paradise is noteworthy:

> We can't know for sure, but probably the water vapor conopy contributed to health and longevity by filtering out the deadly radiations from outer space. Today we know those rays are harmful and are a chief cause of mutations and other deteriorative activity in living flesh. Then, too, the cumulative effects of sin had not been fully felt.[18]

The curriculum then shifts to Genesis chapter five, noting the longevity of people in pre-flood times. "Noah had a son when he was 500 years old!"[19] Nine hundred-year-olds were not uncommon in the Hawaiian-like greenhouse of rejuvenating vapors.

The linking of aging, ecology, and sin is a creative and complex one. Aging (<u>real</u> aging of the 900-year-old variety) was an indication of God's pleasure before the flood. Sin resulted in the flood, which permanently destroyed the vapor greenhouse. Aging limits, then, are viewed as indications of humankind's sin

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[15] p. 83.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid., pp. 83-4.

[18] Ibid., p. 84.

[19] Ibid., p. 86.

and the resulting destruction of the earth by flood. Aging and sin thus related, aging immediately refers back to ecological disaster.

This is an extremely imaginative explanation of biblical sources. But by taking the literalist view of the Bible (not to mention subsequent interpretation of relations of textual data), the resulting image of premature aging as a sign of sin in unavoidable. A biological process is confused with a literalist interpretation of biblical texts. Longevity and sin related in this way result in an odd view of the aging person. The aging person is a living example of humankind's sinfulness. Aging persons thus conceived have little value in and of themselves. They are merely and basically present reminders of human sin and of God's wrath related to that sin of long ago.

BIBLE DISCOVERY is a curriculum series intended for use in Reformed congregations, including the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The materials are generally brightly colored, visually appealing, and dated by season of the year. It was extremely difficult for this reader to find any consistent pattern in regard to aging in this curriculum. The few examples that follow may give the impression of a singular editorial approach to aging, but the random distribution of these examples within the curriculum materials themselves should be kept in mind.

The Bible Discovery Children's Leaflet for grades one and two, summer, year one, "C" contains a section on ways "God wants us to care for the earth and everything in it." Four pictures

are shown juxtaposed by four others (see figure I below). While this reader has gone far beyond the first or second grade, he had some significant trouble figuring out some of the intended connections between the pictures! The text reads, "Four of these

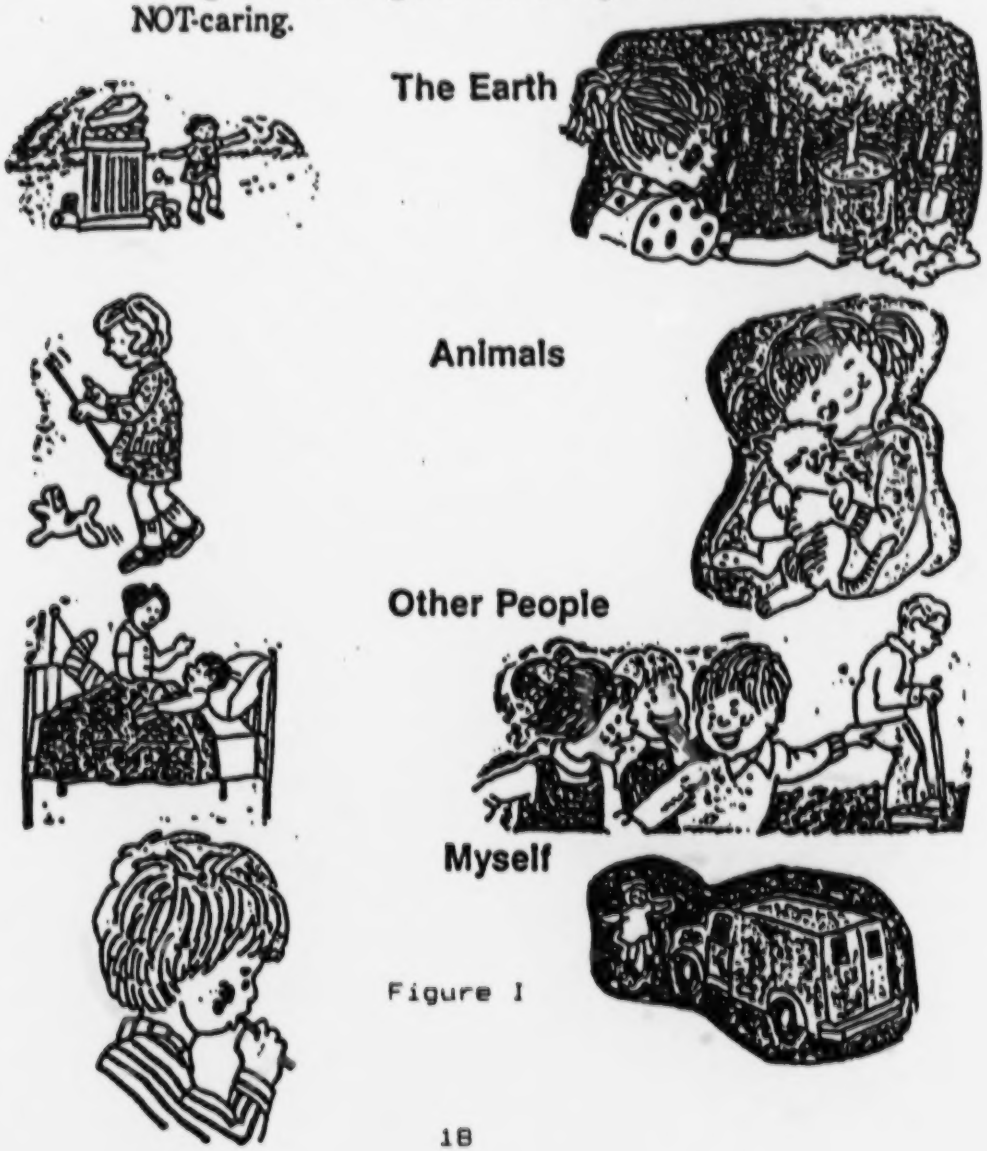
Caring for the Earth
God wants us to care for the earth and everything in it. Four of these pictures show caring. Four show NOT-caring. Put a large X on the pictures that show NOT-caring.
The Earth
Animals
Other People
Myself

Figure I

pictures show caring. Four show NOT-caring. Put a large X on the pictures that show NOT-caring." Four categories of juxtaposed pictures are provided: "the earth," "animals," "other people," and "myself." Under "other people," a male person of age, bent over with a cane, white haired, and wearing glasses, is being laughed at by a group of nasty, insensitive children. Obviously and "X" on this one! While this reader understands the intent of such an exercise, which is probably to stop such potential action on the parts of children everywhere, the aging adult portrayed herein is the only aging adult portrayed in the entire exercise.

Another leaflet from this same series for grades one and two, "D," has "A Read to Me Story" entitled, "Rosie Reaches Out." Basically, the story is about a little girl, Rosie, who visits her great grandmother for the first time at the Hildale Nursing Home. While visiting her great grandmother, with cane but ambulatory (see figure J below), she meets Mrs. Williams, a wheelchair bound aging woman with glasses (see figure K below). Mrs. Williams expresses her loneliness, and Rosie volunteers to become Mrs. Williams's "great granddaughter" too.

This is a genuinely well written story. But once again, the curriculum portrays the aging adult <u>only</u> as physically degenerating and lonely. Aging persons are for the most part portrayed in the curriculum in physical and/or mental decline, or not at all.

Leaflet "H" in the same series is telling. In a selection,

Rosie Reaches Out

A Read-to-Me Story

Rosie's great grandmother had just moved to the Hilldale Nursing Home. She was ninety-two years old. She couldn't live alone anymore. Rosie and her parents were going for a visit. On the way, Rosie's father told her that Great Grandmother had a roommate named Mrs. Williams. She was blind and would be in a wheelchair. Rosie had never known a blind person or a person in a wheelchair before. How would she know

Rosie's father shook Mrs. Williams' hand. "I'm so pleased to meet you," he said. Rosie's mother said, "I hope you are well today." Rosie looked at her mother. Mother smiled and nodded toward Mrs. Williams. Rosie felt shy, but she reached out and touched Mrs. Williams. And Mrs. Williams grasped her hand. Rosie said, "Hi!"

Mrs. Williams hung onto Rosie's hand. "I feel like I know you, Rosie," she said. "Your

Figure J

Figure K

"People Who Care," the text reads:

> Here are people in your church. They worship God Together. They care for one another. They have fun together. Someone is missing. That someone is you! Draw yourself in the empty space. Make sure your hands touch the hands of thos on both sides of you.

Interestingly, no aging person is represented in the circle of people who care (see figure L below). Someone beside the child is missing from the picture!

In Bible Storybook for summer 1989 for grades one and two, the story of Josiah and Hulda is faithfully recounted. The prophetess Hulda is presented as a menacing figure of great age (see figure M below). The impact of the picture of Hulda was visually shocking for this reader. The association of an aging

woman and a somewhat "scary" image would be difficult to discount.

Figure L

Why the general lack of attention to the aging adult in this curriculum? One possible answer might be that this cycle of curriculum materials tends to focus more on Bible than on

patterns of social relations. Another might be that the curriculum units themselves often stress creation and covenant rather than the possibilities of aging. The photo below (figure N) is actually the dominant image of the curriculum as a whole.

Figure M

There are some exceptions. A splendid story, "Nighttime Sky," Children's Leaflet, summer, year one, for ages two and three, "E," presents an aging black grandmother and her

three, "E," presents an aging black grandmother and her granddaughter in a mutually respectful relationship (see figure O below). In another positive effort, an aging man is included in a group of people Jesus is talking to about the gospel (see figure P below) in Children's Leaflet, "G," summer, year one.

Figure N

Figure O

Figure P

On the other hand, in Bible Discovery Children's Leaflet

How Could I Help?

Mr. Haynes is an older man. He lives all alone because his wife died some years ago and he has no children. Everyday Mr. Haynes can be seen working in his flower garden. He enjoys his garden, but the work is very difficult for him. Every afternoon Mr. Haynes sits alone on his porch until it gets dark in the evening. He always says, "Hi," when people pass by. Mr. Haynes does not go to church because he no longer can drive a car, and it is much too far for him to walk.

How can children make a difference in Mr. Haynes' life? Read these ideas and check those you think are possible.

___ Spend time with him and work with him in the garden.
___ Visit him and play games like checkers.
___ Adopt him as a part of your family and include him on family outings.
___ Arrange with your family or someone else in your church to invite him to go to church and drive him there.
___ Ask other adults how they might help to get him involved in church activities.
___ Find out from your pastor or other adults in your church or neighborhood how to get him involved in community activities for senior citizens.

What are some of your ideas?

How might these suggestions help Mr. Haynes have faith in God?

Ruth Martinez and her children are refugees from South America. The people in your church are helping them get settled. The family does not go to church because they do not speak English. The children stay close to their mother and do not play with the other children in the neighborhood. They feel strange in their new surroundings and do not know English. How might you make a difference?

___ Ask your parents to invite the family for a picnic.
___ Plan to play word games to help the family improve their English skills.
___ Suggest to adult friends that they go with the new family to church on Sunday.
___ Bake some cookies or a cake to take to the family as a friendly gesture of welcome.

What else would you suggest?

How might these suggestions help Mrs. Martinez and her children have faith in God?

Figure 0

"G," grades five and six, summer, year one, a story is included, "How Can I Help?" Part of the selection is provided above for consideration (see figure Q). Once again, old age is presented as synonymous with loneliness, physical degeneration, and loss. The result is that Mr. Haynes obviously needs help. The child decides what sort of help is required without attention to the perceived needs (if any) of the intended "helped." The presumption that Mr. Haynes does not have faith in God is curious and unfortunate.

Moreover, the visual connection of South American refugees and "an older man" implies an equality of marginalization in the social context that is difficult to justify. While it is true that both are marginal, to be white, male, English speaking, (apparently) middle-class, and aged is not the same as being Hispanic, female, poor, and young. Marginalization has different origins in these two cases, and cannot be dismissed. Said another way, marginalization has different social origins and meanings even when functional outcomes have social similarities.

In the Bible Storybook for grades five and six for the summer of 1989, "Miriam Praises God" is one of the stories. "Miriam was one of the oldest women in their big family." Miriam tells the story of the Exodus for a group of children from a "first-person" point of view (see figure R below).[30] The story is a responsible portrayal of the Exodus, and Miriam is presented as an important part of the family because she is the bearer of

[30] Pp. 23-5.

the story. Interestingly, Miriam in this story has integrity and importance of her own, while at the same time important because of the Exodus story. This is a finely crafted story, worthy of further analysis.

Miriam Praises God

Figure R

The GOD WITH US program is produced by Sadlier for the Catholic school setting. Its format and photography are extremely appealing. When the aging are portrayed, they are visually represented in three basic ways. Aging is associated with sickness (see figure S below)[21], with significant medical care (see figure T below)[22], and with grandparenting (see figures

[21] Growing With the Church, p. 124.

[22] Growing With the Catholic Faith, cover of curriculum book.

U, V, W below).[23]

Figure S

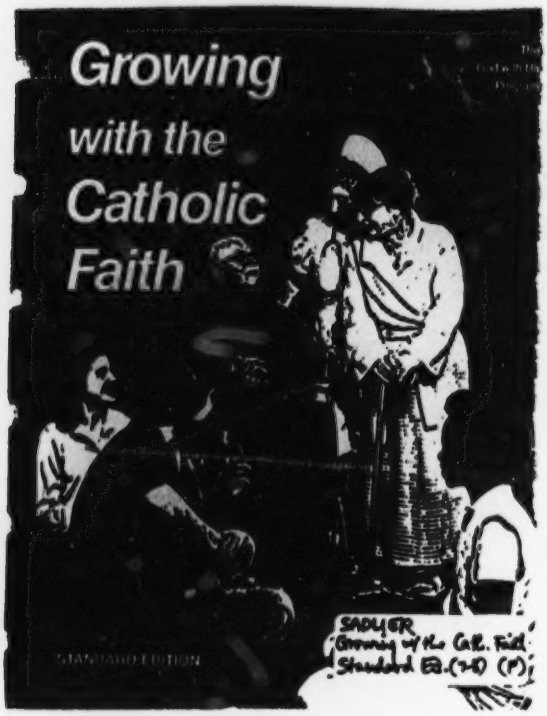

Figure T

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[23] Growing With the Church, p. 267, 40; Growing With Jesus, p. 39.

Figure U

Other images of aging are not immediately present, nor are the aging discussed in the text of the curriculum in any signficant manner.

Figure V

Figure W

Discussion

My original intent for this project was to look at the changing images of aging in selected curriculum materials from 1975 to 1989. After weeks of analysis, and after "cutting and pasting" hundreds of pictures, it became clear that there had been no significant change during that period in the nature of images of aging. I believe this current paper is a fair representation, then, of the ways aging have been, and are, presented in many curriculums used in church-related settings.

The ways in which these externally produced bundles of educational assumptions enter into the taken-for-granted world of the local congregation is worthly of future study. As I have suggested elsewhere, curriculum is both developed and is a result of formal and informal social processes that are both overt and covert. In their ongoing evolutions communities intentially or unintentionally produce, reproduce, sustain, limit, or delte socially plausible knowledge structures, encoding systems, and their related patterns of social activity--thus changing the curriculum in order to more effectively solve the problems of everyday life. Socially plausible knowledge structures, encoding systems, and their related patterns of social activity are shaped over time by a community's implicit and explicit assumptions regarding such matters as the conception of time and space, the nature of reality, the relationships between humans and nature, the relationships between humans and humans, the relationship between humans and god(s), and the character of innate human

nature. Viewed in this way, curriculum is never hidden, only (at times) unrecognized because of its immediacy. Curricular materials enter the community's curriculum within this dynamic life-sustaining process.[24]

Let me be clear--I am not suggesting that aspects of aging such as physical decline or life losses should be avoided by curriculum materials. Not at all! What has provided the critical "edge" of most of my remarks in this paper is the limited exposure of the pre-adult student to a wide range of images of aging. An illustration may be of value here. Before I began this project, I casually asked my seven-year-old son Benjamin, "What comes to your mind when you think of an old person?" He immediately ticked off the following attributes: grey hair, wrinkles, bent over, lonely, no work, cane, glasses, and bald. I then asked my eleven-year-old son John the same question. He replied: poor eyesight, loss of hearing, grey hair, wrinkles, and a lowered immune system (his words!). These were the very attributes assigned to written and visual images in most of the curriculum pieces examined above! Is this all it means to be old? Do all persons of age fit neatly herein? Where is the person, created in the image of God, in all this?

It has been said that prejudices, positive and negative, help us deal with the uncertainties of life. Insofar as this is true, limited images of aging help prevent persons and groups

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[24] See Ronald H. Cram, "Removing the Silver: Education That Is Relgious," Liberal Religious Education, October 1988, pp. 23-9.

from seeing beyond narrow images. Thomas R. Cole has written that the core issue here may not be in the many negative stereotypes that lurk in popular culture regarding aging, but the fact that these stereotypes are not socially adequate anymore. It could very well be that the curriculums analyzed herein are simply replaying selected value commitments of a puritanical and Victorian era; that is, that physical decay and decline are equated with sinfulness.[25] Add economic considerations to this ethos, and the relation of sin and ill health becomes incredibly complex at the community level.

Is it really possible to see through the culturally accepted prejudices about aging in a way that affirms plurality among the entire aging population? I believe social criticism is possible, but it is unclear to me on what bases an alternate vision of aging might be developed. Hans-Ruedi Weber's simple little book, Living In The Image Of Christ: Christ The Sage, Christ The Crucified, Christ The Artist may hold a clue for the creation of such an alternate vision. Weber writes:

> Where the image of God is being restored, the quest for identity will no more be divisive. With it variously shaped identities people from among all races, social classes, and cultures will form a community with one another and for one another. They find their basic human identity as they are incorporated into Christ's body, a notion which is central

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[25] See Thomas R. Cole, "The 'Enlightened' View of Aging: Victorian Morality in a New Key," in What Does It Mean To Grow Old? edited by Thomas R. Cole and Sally A. Gadow (Durham: Duke University Press, 1986), pp. 117-30.

for the letters to the Colossians and Ephesians.[24]

As the interplay between the image of God, aging, and education occurs, it is my anticipation that alternative ways of seeing aging will emerge. This is my hope, and the focus of needed future work in this area.

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[24] (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1986), p. 61.